

❧ Two Poems and the Aesthetics of Play

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John Matthias's poem "Double Derivation, Association, and Cliché: From *The Great Tournament Roll of Westminster*" begins with a list and a refrain:

(I)

The heralds wear their tabards correctly.
Each, in his left hand, carries a wand.
Before and after the Master of Armour
Enter his men: three of them carry the staves.
The mace bearer wears a yellow robe.
In right & goodly devysis of apparyl
The gentlemen ride.
The double-curving trumpets shine.

Who breaks a spear is worth the prize. (*SM* 72)

These words come from another list, the tournament roll cited in the poem's title. The tournament was staged in 1511 to celebrate the birth of a son to Henry VIII and Katharine of Aragon. The tournament was part masquerade, part liturgy, part sport, part arts festival, part international diplomacy, and part military combat. These lines may have been occasioned by an early crisis in Matthias's life as a poet. He writes in his essay "Places and Poems: A Self-Reading and a Reading of the Self in the Romantic Context from Wordsworth to Parkman":

I was not, I suppose, untypical of my generation in the 1960s by becoming sufficiently caught up in the machinery of protest and the language of neo-Marxist analysis to feel in the end both confused

and inauthentic, "dragging passions, notions, shapes of faith / Like culprits to the bar," and subjecting everything, including the pleasures I took in a new marriage, in the birth of my first child, in solitude, and in the arts to a rigorous inquisition with respect to means and ends considered in the context of political activism. (*Reading Old Friends* 41)

In part, his response to this crisis was to begin reading Wordsworth. In retrospect, Matthias saw his need for Wordsworth as similar to John Stuart Mill's. Mill found that in the midst of his intellectual and emotional life "all feeling was dead within [him]" and that he was more "a stock or a stone" than a human. Mill wrote in his autobiography:

What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of. (89)

Matthias's decision to read Wordsworth (or any of the Romantics) is a moment of great interest, one Matthias himself partly examines in his essay. What he expected to find there and cultivate for the sake of his own poetry, even for the sake of his own mental health, was a way to heal the split between drudgery and life, work and play. As he writes in "Places and Poems," he was looking for a world that didn't keep the place for the artistic soul "separated from the place in which we earn our living" (*Reading Old Friends* 52). Accordingly, in Matthias's perspective, Wordsworth escaped the urge always to be working by finding the particular place, the lake country, in which he could, as Whitman said, "loaf and invite the soul" (45).

Though place is central to Matthias's own thinking about his work, and is perhaps essential (in his view) for a healthy imaginative spirit, and though Suffolk temporarily became Matthias's place, the location in which he could invite the soul to loaf, for my purpose, and in my reading of Matthias's poetry, the urgency of place is usurped by that of play. In fact, whatever the place—South Bend, Indiana; Suffolk, England; Columbus, Ohio; the Wessex of Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*; or sixteenth-century Westminster—the poet must situate himself in relation to the act of writing, both the play and the work at hand. Matthias grounds his poetry not in location but in action; while the place changes, the poetry must go on.

It is no coincidence that many of the poems that Matthias wrote after his disciplined turning to Wordsworth and to Suffolk, though rich in the lore of local history and culture, focus on the centrality of play to the human experience. Included in this turn are poems he wrote for his daughters, celebrating their playful childhood, especially "Poem for Cynouai" from *Crossing*. This new focus was not so much to emulate Wordsworth's fascination with childhood, its supposed natural status or its supposed innocence, but rather to use childhood as a means of recovering the idea of play. Matthias writes in "Places and Poems":

If my own route to the responsibilities of being an adult was through my children, it was also through my children that I found the route to childhood. And one thing I wanted to learn on my way to childhood and back again had something to do with the meaning play.
(50–51)

Arguably, what he found by returning (in poetry) to childhood, his own by way of his daughters', was an aesthetic of play (albeit "provisional," as he calls it in the allied poem, "Turns") by which the writing and reading of his poetry can be not so much judged as enhanced.¹

This provisional aesthetic enters the poet's work not by precept but by example, by play itself. The beginning of "Double Derivation" does not announce the subject but exhibits it. The list catalogs the accouterments of courtly tournaments: tabards, wands, servants, staves, a band leader in a yellow robe, all the trappings of late chivalry. This train of particulars identifies play as artifice. And yet, avoiding the kind of abstraction that waylaid Mill, the words themselves exhibit the poem's playfulness. Reading the chronicle of play, one can also read the poetry as play—the humorous tone, the exuberant detail, even the archaic English: "In right and goodly devysis of apparyl / The gentlemen ride" (*SM* 72).

Part II turns the poem in a slightly new direction, making its search for an aesthetic not only more explicit but also comparative. It begins: "Or makes a forest in the halls of Blackfriars / at Ludgate whych is garneychyd wyth trees & bowes" (*SM* 72). Here, "or" works like a double hinge upon which the poem swings to other subjects. It is not just a poem about Westminster but (as in other sections) a poem about Ludgate, shipyards, Bosworth, Flodden, Empress Wu, Henry VII, Shakespeare, the Globe, and two old men playing chess in a garden. "Or" tells us that to pretend in this way is as much as to pretend in that way; these too are worth the prize.

Though many have considered poetry in terms of play, among them Johan Huizinga (alluded to in part IV) Matthias makes play the vehicle as well as the subject of the poem. He uses the festivities and tournaments of the sixteenth-century court to create his own world of play. The tournaments like the one that sponsored the production of *The Great Tournament Roll of Westminster* were often raucous affairs, even if their ostensible purpose was to serve as a means of "eschewing . . . Idleness the ground of all vice, and to exercise the thing that shal be honorable and to the bodye healthfull and profitable" (Anglo 21). Politically these events demonstrated the wealth, sophistication, and magnificence of the court. This specific event was meant to demonstrate Henry's political, military, and sexual prowess. In Westminster the king used the tournament in a way not unlike a military parade; it demonstrated his financial strength, intimidated his foreign and domestic rivals, and encouraged his allies. As the roll was the record of this event, it also allowed Henry the opportunity to give the future an elaborate self-portrait. In fact, after René d'Anjou's and Philip the Good's tournaments, upon which Henry's were modeled, the party had become much more than the armed encounter of chivalry. Combat (or sport) was often preceded and concluded by poetry, dance, and extravagant charades. "Eschewing Idleness," the contestants would often enter the tournament field in fantastical costumes—dressed as nuns, friars, monsters, or (in one case) piloting a large fake ship across rolling fields and through the shield-hung trees (Anglo 39). This supplies some of the material for Matthias's lines:

Who will decorate the golden tree,
Employ properly the captive giant
And the dwarf? Who will plead
His rights despite decrepitude . . . ? (SM 76)

The knights (including Henry) assumed stage names (some of which Matthias evokes): Joyeulx Penser, Bon Vauloir, Valliant Desyr, or (for the king) Noble Couer Loyal. The roll itself was a part of the artistic festivity, which often (as in the case of *Westminster*) concluded with a poem. Even when the tournament event became violent, when knights were unhorsed and unhinged, the seemingly incongruous arts festival kept pace. In the same way, the phrasing Matthias adopts from *The Great Tournament Roll* mixes the language of the jousting score sheet with the tone of celebration. Even when the words themselves chronicle violence, war, and death, they are full of play, stuck on play, as in part V,

Who breaks a schylld on shields
 a saylle on sails
 a sclev upon his lady's sleeves . . .
 And in the north, & for the nearer rival.
 Who meteth Coronall to Coronall, who beareth
 a man down:—down the distance to Westminster,
 down the distance in time. (*SM* 74)

and part VI,

Slaughter out of ceremony, famine
 out of feasting, out of power
 parsimony, out of revels
 revelation . . .

As an axe in the spine can reveal
 As an arrow in the eye.

Who breaks a spear is worth the prize. (*SM* 75)

In addition to the play world and text of the sixteenth century, Matthias discretely uses other much more personal moments of play; for example, though we do not recognize it until later, all of this sixteenth-century theatricality could actually be read as the poet's recollection of his own childhood play. This play becomes most obvious in part IV; here we are introduced to the poet's childhood, his cousins, and their world of (sometimes interrupted) play:²

& like the Burgkmairs
these illuminations:—
 where, o years ago, say twenty-two or
 say about five hundred,
 cousins in the summertime would
 ritualize their rivalries
 in sumptuous tableaux.
 Someone holds a camera. Snap.
 In proper costume, Homo Ludens wears
 Imagination on his sleeve.

.
 I remember that. (*SM* 74)

My attention to Matthias's use of childhood in this poem is not merely to show the adult poet reading Wordsworth and recalling the past, but to show him reimagining its play world. This poem begins with a playful reenactment of the tournament, but I believe the reader is asked to enter that play in a new form, to rejoin it twenty-two years later with the poet, in poetry. As the courtly ceremony is reincarnated in Matthias's childhood play, his childhood is simultaneously replayed under the pen, appearing ultimately on the page we read. Matthias writes, "& like the Burgkmairs / *these* illuminations." The Burgkmairs illustrated tournament rolls and other courtly records with woodcuts for the emperor Maximilian. Their illuminations became the model for Henry's own illustrators, in the same way that the emperor was also Henry's model. Thus one can read, "like the Burgkmairs / *these* illuminations" as well as "like the Burgkmairs / *these* illuminations." One must not forget, however, that these illuminations do not represent the poet's exact childhood, though they are inspired by memories, they are fed by books. Even yet, that he should have found them not in a trunk of costumes but in a collotype reproduction of a tournament roll is nevertheless another act of play.

I am not the first to write of Matthias's focus on play; Jeremy Hooker did so in his essay "Crossings and Turns: The Poetry of John Matthias." Hooker, an accomplished reader of Matthias's poetry, correctly claims one of the poet's subjects to be "man the actor, or player" (102). Hooker attends to play, its "theatrical rhetoric" and its "carnival atmosphere," insofar as that it illuminates the subject—human nature (101). In this regard, I think Hooker follows one of Matthias's sources, Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. Matthias's use of this book, however, extends beyond Huizinga's focus on human nature, even beyond Huizinga's own attempts at an aesthetics of play. In fact, *Homo Ludens* could be added to *The Great Tournament Roll* as one of the books found in the metaphorical trunk whereby Matthias constructs "Double Derivation." Matthias's poem uses many of Huizinga's subjects—war play, the guild system, the poet as *vates*, and (most obviously) the poet and child. Matthias even attends to some of Huizinga's terms, such as *jongleur*, which links poets and feudal regalia—heralds, boasters, braggarts, jesters, minstrels, and other court performers (Huizinga 39–42).

Huizinga, however, identifies poetry with play, perhaps even confines it to play. He writes:

All poetry is born of play: the sacred play of worship, the festive play of courtship, the martial play of the contest, the disputatious play of

braggadocio, mocking and invective, the nimble play of wit and readiness. (129)

Though associating play and poetry liberates and reclaims a world of material for poetic festivities and tournaments, it also has its costs. These become evident when one looks closely at Huizinga's definition of *play*:

It is an activity which proceeds within certain limits of time and space, in a visible order, according to rules freely accepted, and outside the sphere of necessity or material utility. The play-mood is one of rapture and enthusiasm and is sacred or festive in accordance with the occasion. A feeling of exaltation and tension accompanies the action, mirth and relaxation follow. (132)

Whereas this view of play (and by association, poetry) could revive Mill's stagnant sensibilities, freeing art from narrow pragmatism, it could also, when taken dogmatically, banish the poem from the realm of the efficacious to the world of mere "mirth and relaxation." The same emphasis seems evident in Jeremy Hooker's convincing affirmation of Matthias as the poet of play. Hooker writes:

Matthias the poet knows himself to belong to the species *Homo Ludens*. Not surprisingly, therefore, there is more of Johan Huizinga's philosophy of play, which distinguishes man from the animals and inspires the creativity which shapes the human world, in John Matthias' poetry than there is Marxism. (103)

The terms of Hooker's dichotomy are unbalanced, stressing the playful aesthetic of Matthias's poetry at the expense of its utility, that is, if Marxism in this context is meant to suggest the concerns of work. Pushed to an extreme, such reasoning might raise questions about whether a poetics of play can produce "serious" poetry—in Matthias's case, elegies, poems about illness and war, poems for his uncle Edward, or poems for aging friends, such as "Everything to be endured" or his poem "26 June 1381 / 1977" on the beheading of Geoffrey Lidster (*SM* 12, 132, 44).

Huizinga anticipates (but doesn't manage to avoid) the inconsequence of this aesthetic when he misreads Friedrich Schiller's concept of *Spieltrieb* from *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Schiller postulated two contrasting motives for human action: *Strofftrieb* and *Formtrieb*. The object of the *Strofftrieb* (in Schiller's construct) is often material, or of concern to the

42 body; the object of the Formtrieb is often ideal or conceptual, of the mind. The *Spieltrieb* was Schiller's solution to a perceived tension between these two drives, the dialectic of sense and form. About the human, Schiller writes:

Should there be cases in which he were to have this twofold experience simultaneously, . . . to feel himself matter and to come to know himself as mind, then he would in such cases, and in such cases only, have a complete intuition of his human nature. (95)

Poetry in Schiller's view deserves special recognition because it is "that kind of free activity which is at once its own end and its own means," because it is simultaneously ideal and material, knowledge and feeling, mind and body (209). Therefore, it is not merely a momentary beauty, but a way for humanity to free itself from dualism. It is not this, however, that Huizinga criticizes, but rather the idea of *Spieltrieb* as "play-instinct." Huizinga writes:

It seems preposterous to ascribe the cave paintings at Altamira, for instance, to mere doodling—which is what it amounts to if they are ascribed to the "play-instinct" . . . though the primary importance of play as a cultural factor is the main thesis of this book, we still maintain that the origin of art is not explained by a reference to a play-"instinct," however innate. (160)

Perhaps it is Huizinga's idea of humanity that is offended here; "instinct" suggests too much of the animal. When Schiller writes, "Man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays," what bothers Huizinga is not that poetry might be "mere doodling," but that humans might be mere doodlers (Schiller 107). Anthropologist to the end, he sacrifices his aesthetics for his idea of human nature. Schiller, however, cannot and does not ignore the doodle objection; Huizinga merely misses the full course of the argument. Schiller interrogates himself, asking: "Is beauty not degraded by being made to consist of mere play and reduced to the level of those frivolous things which have always borne this name?" (105). Soon after, he writes: "With beauty man shall only play, and it is with beauty only that he shall play" (107). Perhaps the price that Schiller pays to keep play as an aesthetic priority is to be obliged to regard the sort of play which is pragmatic and ugly as not really play at all. *Spieltrieb* is reserved only for the craftsman, the artist, and the philosopher—the real players in Schiller's world—only play as such deserves its name.

Matthias figures into all this not merely because of the affinities between his work and Schiller's, nor because of Huizinga's influence, but because Matthias also is testing play as an aesthetic—trying to see if it is ultimately useless. I think he survives or eludes both Huizinga's anthropology and Schiller's idealism. Matthias survives, in part, on poetry. Discursive prose "on the aesthetic" or "on the play-element" must eventually come to a point, say something, either by or about abstractions. Matthias's poetry, however, while it has the liberty of coming to a point, has the advantage often of serving as its own justification. It is not that Hooker's prose, or Huizinga's, or Schiller's, can't make the same claim, but that discursive prose is more likely to be designed for communication and utility than for purely aesthetic pleasure.

Hooker is right to call Matthias "both scribe and magician" (Hooker 105). "Double Derivation" comes very close to blurring the distinctions between subject and object, idea and poem, work and play. The poetry assumes a world-encompassing function; it works to play and plays to work, revels and reveals, illustrates and illumines. With poetic play, Matthias represents the human as player—"imagination on his sleeve"—and poetry as play. Thus while he writes as a chronicler, a constructor of fashion, a historian of war and death, of truth, of memory, the words play through the poem against even their own histories, making time, context, and culture a part of the carnival. From Max to Harry to James, the poem is at play.

The depth of Matthias's provisional aesthetic and the efficacy of play in a world of work becomes more apparent in the companion poem, "Clarifications for Robert Jacoby: 'Double Derivation . . .', Part IV, ll. 1–10; Part VII, ll. 1–15, 22–28." It begins:

A moment ago, Robert, I thought I was watching
 a wren, the one which nests
 By my window here, fly, dipping & rising,
 across this field in Suffolk
 So like the one we used to play in, in Ohio,
 when we were boys. But it was
 Really something that you, Dr Jacoby, would
 be able to explain by pointing out
 To me in some expensive, ophthalmological text
 the proper Latin words.

It was no wren (still less the mythological bird
 I might have tried to make it)—
 But just defective vision: one of those spots
 or floating motes before the eyes

That send one finally to a specialist. Not
 a feathered or a golden bird,
 Nothing coming toward me in the early evening
 mist, just a flaw, as they say,
 In the eye of the beholder.

Like? in a way?
 the flaw in the printer's eye
 (the typesetter's, the proof-
 reader's) that produced and then
 Let stand that famous line
 in Thomas Nashe's poem about the plague,
 "Brightness falls from the air",
 when what he wrote was, thinking
 Of old age and death, "Brightness,
 falls from the *hair*". (SM 78)

These stanzas focus on a pair of errors, one personal and the other historical. The first, a poet's misperception of a wren, is no wren, nor even an image of a wren, but rather a defect of vision, a speck in the poet's eye. This flaw is both recognized and (possibly) remedied by an adult, the poet's cousin and former playmate, Robert Jacoby. Jacoby "grew-up" to become a professional, an ophthalmologist, a worker rather than a player. The second error arrives in the third stanza and seems more akin in function to the second part of "Double Derivation"; it expands the subject beyond autobiography in the same way that part II of "Double Derivation" expands the subject beyond *The Great Tournament Roll*. Matthias introduces this error with some hesitation, "Like? in a way?" as if his metaphor might itself be mistaken, or perhaps fearing or hoping that the same might happen to one of his own poems as happened to Thomas Nashe's "A Litany in Time of Plague"—a printing error having turned an indifferent line into a great one. Though outside of the scope of the poet's childhood play, this act of misperception (like? the other) has achieved the same result as wit, imagination, and vision. Reader and poet are made to ask how this can be a great line when it was intended to describe brightness falling, like dandruff from the *hair*.

"Clarifications" begins with mistakes to challenge the aesthetics of play, the "carnival atmosphere" of "Double Derivation." If it does not doubt the act of imaginative play, it does relegate such play entirely to the world of the child, suggesting that it is lost after the child becomes an adult, a worker. At

the outset, then, this poem is less a poem of *play* and more a poem of *work*. Here the adult doubts the legitimacy of the child's world, with its imaginary jousts and friends. Matthias, in self-critique, avoids shallow conclusions and (as I have suggested in regard to "Double Derivation") the dead ends of Huizinga's anthropological assumptions and Schiller's ideals.

Yet, before grappling with the function of work as self-critique in Matthias's "Clarifications," it is best to turn briefly to the autobiography, the story of a particular adulthood, and of past childishness, that makes this companion poem a "clarification." The poem claims to be written in Suffolk, though it remembers a childhood in Ohio. The poet used to play dress-up with his cousin Robert Jacoby. Both the boys had "professional" fathers. In addition, the poet's father was a Freemason, and in that role wore a cape and recited initiation chants in the kitchen. As the poem confesses, many of these details are preserved in a photograph of Matthias and Jacoby. The boys were unhappy; perhaps James had arrived, another cousin. James liked baseball and had a paper route at home in Columbus. The poet didn't like him. Jacoby, however, joined James and the fathers, the workers; he grew up and became a professional.

In "Clarifications" the ludic chant that drove "Double Derivation" gives way to the autobiographical, if flawed, eye of the poet looking back to his youth, not to Henry's court. What "Clarifications" clarifies is that "Double Derivation," though it seems to usurp the material of Henry's court, is actually as much an autobiographical poem as a historical one. In this poem we meet the cousins of part IV; we discover the actual photograph and the actual costumes that support the simile in part VII: "I reach for words as in a photograph / I reach for costumes in a trunk" (*SM* 76). In this poem we discover the source for:

All the sticks & staves, the whole complicated
paraphernalia accumulated to suggest
Authentic weaponry and precise historical dates,
not to mention exact geographical places. (*SM* 78–79)

Here we find the real artifacts, the real "ancient books" of "Double Derivation."

One should not, however, conclude too quickly, forcing a simple dichotomy on these poems. Though "Clarifications" *works*, recounting the past, correcting misperceptions, explaining the real facts that are often obscured in play, while "Double Derivation" *plays*, racing off into imaginary worlds, "Clarifications" is not merely a poem of work. It does not betray the

46 play spirit that informs its parent poem by assuming adulthood—growing up while the world is watching. In fact, the poem concludes with a bold triumph of the ludic quality of poetry. The last image of the poem is an intricately layered product of the poet's continual reimagining. There is little in these lines that explicitly points to autobiography or history:

A child plays with a stick. And jumps on both feet
 imitating, since she sees it in the field
 (With a stick in its beak), a wren. She enters
 the poem as she enters the field. I will
 Not see her again. She goes to her world of stick
 and field and wren; I go to my world
 Of poem. She does not know it, and yet she is here:
 here in the poem as surely as there
 In the field, in the dull evening light, in the world
 of her imagining, where, as the mist descends,
 She is a wren.

As I write that down she is leaving the field.
 She goes to her house where her
 Father and mother argue incessantly, where
 her brother is sick. In the house
 They are phoning a doctor. In the poem—
 because I say so,
 because I say once more
 That she enters the world of her imagining
 where, as the mist descends,
 She is a wren—
 She remains in the field. (*SM* 80–81)

In these lines all the optical distortions and poetic anxieties of preceding lines (and even by association the prior poem) are condensed in the imagined child at play, who herself pretends she is a wren, thereby both returning to and escaping from the poet's mote in the eye. The tournaments and dress-up games of "Double Derivation" are rescued from adult critique, the world of work, with these lines. Even the poet's own aging does not exile the poet from the world of play. Like Nashe's graying hair transformed, the poet's failing eyesight contributes to the poem's playfulness.

I do not want, however, to overgeneralize the predominance of play—especially by showing how the obviously less ludic poem succumbs to the

child's world. This misemphasis is the same misemphasis that Hooker makes by opposing Marxism (a version of work) to play in Matthias's poetry. As much as Hooker is useful in allowing us to detect this unsteady antithesis, he also provides us with means by which to correct it. He writes about "26 June 1381 / 1977," another poem focusing (in part) on mistakes and accidents and playing upon historical detail—the peasant's revolt in Norfolk, Henry Despenser, Geoffrey Lidster (the executed leader), and some (mistakenly) damaged then (accidentally) recovered reredos: "While the sketch of the main connections is bound to sound clumsy, the poem lives in its imaginative recreation of key events and its meditation upon them" (100).³ It is important, in fact, that Matthias "meditates" upon these "connections"; meditation, rather than evaluation (or even elaboration), allows Matthias, as Hooker contends, to write in paradox. In this, Hooker escapes his own oversimplified dichotomy, Marx to Huizinga. He writes:

Matthias] is far from forgetting the claims of a reality that refuses transformation. In fact there is often a duality in his poems which prevents play from becoming merely indulgent when in terms of "Clarifications for Robert Jacoby," "reality itself" disturbs the "elaborate rituals." A fair summary of this important dimension of his work might be that the poet at his creative play makes poems that are themselves worlds, but makes them out of the stuff of reality, which exists independently of him, makes its own claims, questions the poet, and calls him to witness all that is not himself. (103)

Though Hooker gives us more than a "fair summary," I am more interested in the viability of Matthias's provisional aesthetic of play than in the problems of selfhood in his poetry. The two, however, as Hooker's remark implies, may be inseparable. For example, when in "Clarifications" Matthias writes of his cousin James, "He was reality / itself. I hated him" (80), is the adult poet reflecting (without ironic distance) upon "the real world" as such, thereby writing today as an uncomplicated poet of play? Or (as I believe) is the adult poet "reading" and accepting the playful world of his youth, though distanced and matured, strengthened by experience and work? In "Clarifications" Matthias's comments on "reality" follow his perusal of his own image in an old photograph. It is the expression on the boy Matthias's face to which the poet gives words: "Reality itself—I hated [it]." I emphasize the past tense of this hatred; Matthias has not escaped to imaginary worlds, nor has he embraced a "reality" called "work" or "Marxism." Instead, Matthias's

48 aesthetic aims to transcend both the adult work—"dragging passions . . . / . . . to the bar"—and the child's indulgent play, what Huizinga calls "mere doodling."

As a way of concluding what one cannot conclude, I return to the last lines of Matthias's "Clarifications." To set up his own conclusion Matthias writes:

[J]ust outside my window
A child plays with a stick. And jumps on both feet
imitating, since she sees it in the field
(With a stick in its beak), a wren. She enters
the poem as she enters the field. I will
Not see her again. She goes to her world of stick
and field and wren; I go to my world
Of poem. (*SM* 80–81)

Jacoby has gone to his world of work—Matthias writes, "[H]ow obvious / it should have been!—to be professional, / Respectable, and eminent" (*SM* 79). The girl who plays in the field "goes to her world of stick / and field and wren." Matthias goes to his world of poem—not the world of work, not the world of play. Though he says he will "not see her again," it is questionable if he ever saw her in the first place. After all, she is as much a wren in the field or a mote in the poet's eye as she is an actual girl. She is both inside and outside the poet's adult self-consciousness in the same way that she is both inside and outside the poet's troubled eyesight and the poet's poem. The poet's world of poem is not exactly the child's world of the imagination—the child is free to forget that her "Father and mother argue incessantly, [that] / her brother is sick. [That] in the house / They are phoning a doctor" (*SM* 81). The adult poet does not forget; his poem reminds him of his mortality even while it provides the child a reentry to the world of imagination. The poem, unlike the works of adulthood and the carelessness of childhood, fully embodies play without forgetting the responsibilities of mortality. Matthias writes:

In the poem—
because I say so,
because I say once more
That she enters the world of her imagining
where, as the mist descends,
She is a wren—
She remains in the field. (*SM* 81)

1. "Double Derivation" follows "Turns: Toward a Provisional Aesthetic and a Discipline" as one of "Three Poems on Poetics" in *Reading Old Friends*; the third is "Clarifications for Robert Jacoby." These poems first appeared in this sequence in *Turns* and again in *Northern Summer*.

2. One of these cousins, Robert Jacoby, appears in other poems, including this poem's companion piece and in "Edward," a poem focused on their war-shocked uncle.

3. In fact, this poem exhibits a technique familiar to Matthias, one poem commenting on another, exploring the subject across space and time, imagining the imagination, memorizing memory. "Double Derivation" and "Clarifications" fall into this category, as do "Turns," most of *Crossing*, and more recent poems, such as "Public Poem/Private Poem."

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